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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The participation of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, in sessions and intersessional meetings of the United Nations Forum on Forests has been recognized as a key component in ensuring stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes related to sustainable forest management. At its seventh session, the Forum adopted the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and the multi-year programme of work for the Forum for the period 2007-2015, both of which call for the active and effective participation of major groups in the work of the Forum.

In 2011, the multi-stakeholder dialogue will be held during the first week of the session. Representatives of major groups will share their perspectives on progress made in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and towards the achievement of the four Global Objectives on Forests. They will also present the outcome of the Major Group-Led Initiative in Support of the United Nations Forum on Forests, held in July 2010 in Accra.

The present note gives an account of relevant developments that have occurred since the eighth session of the Forum and describes a number of measures that the Forum may wish to consider in order to continue to enhance the substantive contributions of major groups to its discussions.

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I. Introduction

1. The present note has been prepared to facilitate the multi-stakeholder dialogue at the ninth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests. Three joint discussion papers, prepared by the focal points of major groups in consultation with their networks, are contained in addenda to the present note.

2. Since its inception, the Forum has recognized the contributions of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, in the implementation of sustainable forest management and has made significant progress in enhancing stakeholder participation in its work. At its eighth session, the Forum adopted a resolution on enhanced cooperation and coordination.[1] The Forum encouraged Member States to explore ways in which to increase the participation of stakeholders and civil society, including indigenous and other local and forest-dependent communities and other holders of traditional forest-related knowledge, in future sessions of the Forum and requested its secretariat to provide support for such activities.

3. Between 2009 and 2010, representatives of major groups actively participated in three country- and organization-led initiatives in support of the Forum, held in Guilin, China (November 2009), Accra (July 2010) and Oaxaca, Mexico (August and September 2010), and in the first meeting of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Expert Group on Forest Financing, held in Nairobi (September 2010).

4. Pursuant to United Nations Forum on Forests resolution 7/1, a multi-stakeholder dialogue is held as an agenda item of every Forum session. The Forum secretariat facilitates consultations with the focal points of each major group[2] in order to plan and prepare for the multi-stakeholder dialogue. The format and content of the dialogue are proposed by the focal points, in consultation with the Forum secretariat, to the Bureau of the Forum for its consideration.

5. The Forum secretariat works closely with major group focal points to enhance participation in accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

II. Enhancing stakeholder participation in the future work of the Forum

6. The effective participation of major groups is critical to the success of the international arrangement on forests. Major groups have convened several organization-led initiatives in the past in order to make substantive contributions to discussions on such varied issues as traditional forest-related knowledge and gender and sustainable forest management. As part of the effort to enhance stakeholder participation in the work of the Forum, major groups convened a Major Group-Led Initiative in Support of the Forum, focused on the application of sustainable forest management to poverty reduction and the strengthening of the multi-stakeholder approach within the Forum. It was the first initiative in support of the Forum to have been launched by major groups, and it provided an opportunity for major group representatives from 30 countries to actively develop their contributions and policy

[1] See E/2009/42-E/CN.18/2009/20, chap. I.B.

[2] A complete list of the focal points of major groups is available at www.un.org/esa/forests/contacts-major_groups.html.

recommendations for the ninth session of the Forum. Nearly 70 representatives of major groups as well as Government and intergovernmental organizations participated in the Initiative, which was held from 26 to 30 July 2010 in Accra, and was hosted by the Government of Ghana, with financial support provided by the Governments of Norway, Finland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Austria and Canada, as well as by the International Tropical Timber Organization.

7. The Major Group-Led Initiative was designed to support the United Nations Forum on Forest process by enhancing the meaningful participation of major groups at the policymaking level. The main objectives of the Initiative included: developing concrete recommendations for the ninth session of the Forum; identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the multi-stakeholder dialogue process and formulating specific recommendations aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the dialogue; identifying specific activities through which major groups could make contributions to the International Year of Forests; and fostering alliances, partnerships and networking within major groups and between them and other key players in the international arrangement on forests.

8. The Major Group-Led Initiative recognized the efforts of Member States and other stakeholders to advance sustainable forest management through the Forum and to develop key recommendations linked to tenure rights, access and benefit-sharing, traditional forest-related knowledge, community-based forest enterprises, and leadership in the area of sustainable forest management among women, indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups.

9. During the Initiative, the major groups decided to coordinate their contributions to the ninth session of the Forum and to prepare three joint discussion papers, on the three sub-themes to be considered by the Forum at that session.

10. Representatives of major groups contributed significantly to the work of the first meeting of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Expert Group on Forest Financing, held from 13 to 17 September 2010 in Nairobi. Their proposals and comments on various issues under consideration were submitted for discussion in an open and participatory manner, alongside those of the experts.

III. Multi-stakeholder dialogue at the ninth session of the Forum

11. Pursuant to its resolution 7/1, the Forum holds a multi-stakeholder dialogue at every session. The active involvement of major groups in the dialogue process is important in ensuring that discussions at the ninth session reflect a diverse range of views and concerns.

12. The multi-stakeholder dialogue will be held during the first week of the ninth session and will, inter alia, provide major group representatives with the opportunity to present the report of the Major Group-Led Initiative. During the dialogue, major group representatives will also present the priority areas and recommendations set out in their three discussion papers, concerning community-based forest management; social development and indigenous and local communities, including land tenure; and forests and culture. Major group representatives will continue to be invited to present their views and comments throughout the discussions.

IV. Conclusions

13. Member States and stakeholders may wish to consider approaches to a way forward in improving cooperation in areas where commonalities exist and in continuing to work as a matter of priority in areas where divergences of views exist. They may wish to focus on the following areas for consideration and action:

(a) Continuing stakeholder involvement in intersessional activities of the Forum in an open and participatory manner, and encouraging the consideration of major group perspectives in discussions at Forum sessions to strengthen international forest policy;

(b) Seeking further concrete steps to ensure meaningful participation on the part of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and women, who are the primary groups involved in the use of forests and impacted by forest management decisions (or the lack thereof), and whose full participation is critical to the improvement of sustainable forest management and to a sustained flow of benefits from forests;

(c) Seeking the active and meaningful participation of young people, who provide a unique perspective and can act as "agents of change" through sustainable development education, shifting social and cultural values towards greater sustainability;

(d) Working together to develop effective policy and legal and regulatory frameworks to support community forestry and community-based forest management, based on identified experiences and best practices in such management;

(e) Working together to support identified positive examples that form the framework for a set of guidelines for best practices in capacity development, with the active involvement of women, young people, civil society, small-forest owners, forest businesses and workers, and the scientific community in meaningful improvements in tenure rights and the development of effective associations/unions;

(f) Supporting efforts to develop effective legal systems for the protection of intellectual property rights and the traditional forest-related knowledge of local and indigenous communities which can inform and provide valuable scientific insight into the effects and impacts of and coping strategies for climate change;

(g) Continuing to support the mainstreaming of traditional forest-related knowledge into national forest plans and programmes, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, including local and indigenous communities, non-governmental organizations and the scientific community.

14. Member States may wish to:

(a) Support the major group initiative on the roles of civil society actors and the means of their engagement with the Forum and the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests;

(b) Continue to examine ways in which to encourage the participation of those major groups that thus far have not been involved with the Forum's work;

(c) Encourage and support joint initiatives by major groups on thematic issues considered at Forum sessions, with a view to substantive contributions to the deliberations of the Forum;

(d) Continue to re-evaluate the modalities of the multi-stakeholder dialogue, and consider mainstreaming it into discussions at future sessions of the Forum, taking into account lessons learned by other forums and the outcome of the Major Group-Led Initiative.

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Social development and indigenous and other local and forest-dependent communities, including forest land tenure

Discussion paper submitted by the major groups

Summary

Social development has been significantly neglected in discussions on ways to strengthen sustainable forest management and thereby improve livelihoods and reduce poverty. Strengthening social relations within and between communities is fundamental to increasing the economic benefits and improving the environmental impact of sustainable forest management. Capacity-building, addressing the rights of women and youth, increasing the security of land tenure rights and strengthening the role of associations, unions and networks are key components of social development. The specific measures needed in this regard are well known and many examples of good practices are present throughout the world. Major groups request an urgent collaboration with Governments and other agencies to identify and promote best practices to foster significant, positive social development as a vital foundation for sustainable forest management.

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I. Sustainable forest management and social development

1. As is the case with sustainable development in general, the sustainable management of forests has economic, environmental and social dimensions.

2. Economic and environmental issues have received most of the attention in efforts to strengthen the sustainable management of forests. There is growing understanding of the importance of the economic activities of indigenous, community and family forest rights holders, managers and owners, as well as those of labour, women and youth within and alongside these groups. In addition, the environmental value of quality forest management work is well understood. The social dimension of this work and of its environmental impact has been largely ignored, however.

3. The social dimension of forest management work is concerned with the quality and extent of relationships between families, communities and regions, which constitute the foundation for sustained progress in forest management practices and the generation and distribution of increased economic benefits from sustainably managed forests. This foundation is characterized by cohesion within and between communities, which affords them the ability to cooperate in areas of common interest and to manage conflict. It nurtures a sense of shared identity and purpose at the community and landscape levels that is a powerful source of motivation for improving sustainable forest management.

4. The relative strength or weakness of this foundation has a profound effect on the ability of communities to contribute to lasting improvements in management practices and the resulting improvements in economic benefits, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The economic viability of family and community enterprises and healthy social relationships are prerequisites for sustainable forest management. Those factors are closely interconnected, and their strengths and weaknesses will determine the extent to which they enhance or undermine each other.

5. These principles apply to the sectors represented by the major groups: youth, women, labour, as well as community, indigenous and family forest owners, managers and rights holders, the scientific community and environmental organizations.

6. The development of the social dimension involves strengthening the web of relationships that make up the social foundation for sustainable forest management. Building the capacity of families, communities and indigenous people to more effectively undertake forest management and process and market forest products and services involves both technical skills and the ability to strengthen social relationships. The development of strong, clear and enforceable tenure rights and effective associations are two central components of capacity-building. The meaningful participation of women and youth in all relevant processes and structures is an overriding concern that applies to all dimensions of sustainable forest management.

II. Capacity-building

7. Families, communities, indigenous peoples, workers and associations representing the major groups contribute immeasurably to the benefits currently derived from sustainable forest management and related economic activities.

8. That contribution can be greatly increased with more investment in capacity-building in a range of areas, including management skills for community forest-based enterprises, market access, marketing structures and related networks and forestry extension training and education programmes.

9. Establishing and maintaining conditions that provide for decent, safe and fairly paid work (according to the principles set out in the decent work agenda of the International Labour Organization), supported by adequate skills development programmes, is a further area of capacity-building that is directly relevant to sustainable forest management in all communities.

III. Women

10. In many circumstances, women are the primary users of forests; their full participation is therefore essential in efforts to improve sustainable forest management and increase the flow of benefits derived from forest-related activities to their communities.

11. While women are important users of forests, they often have no rights to the very forests they use and care for. They are excluded from decision-making and lack the information and resources needed to improve the quality of their work and increase the benefits it generates. In many cases, they are denied equitable incomes and representation in leadership positions.

12. Such exclusion is due to several factors, one being that the work of women has been grossly undervalued or ignored because it is often small-scale in nature.

13. Governments and all actors in civil society must recognize the work, knowledge and special needs of women and include them as leading partners in all matters relating to sustainable forest management.

IV. Youth

14. The active and meaningful participation of young people is an essential component of any activity intended to be sustainable in the long term.

15. All Governments, agencies and associations must actively seek a much higher level of involvement of young people in all aspects of their work.

16. While the goal of fostering youth participation is, in part, to provide opportunities for learning, much more than that is at stake: we all need the perspective of those who will live to see the later stages of this increasingly challenging twenty-first century.

17. Young people not only provide this unique perspective, but also are a tremendous resource in terms of their idealism and enthusiasm for volunteer activities and their sense of duty to the community and the environment, all of which are invaluable assets to communities and associations wise enough to put this resource to use. This energy can be expressed in many valuable ways. It can contribute to the work of existing community organizations and can be given specific expression in youth-led initiatives. Opportunities of particular interest lie in the area of sustainable development education, where young people can make a special contribution to helping shift values and lifestyles towards greater sustainability.

18. Constructive cooperation between generations is necessary to build a better future. It is not enough to merely provide opportunities for young people to become involved; they must be present and actively participating, and if they are not, it is important to ask them what they need in order for them to participate.

V. Tenure rights

19. Tenure in the present context refers to the rights to use some or all of the resources present on and beneath forest land. It covers a wide range of legal and customary arrangements, from outright family or community ownership to very restricted community use rights to a single minor resource. Included in that range are many combinations of more or fewer resources and uses, covered by stronger or weaker management rights and responsibilities.

20. Tenure rights both limit and empower the connection of local people to the forest, and also reflect the extent to which the larger society understands and values the role of forest-dependent families and communities in managing forests.

21. Tenure rights are directly related to the commitment of a family or community to long-term sustainable forest management. Many studies show that in regions where families and communities are involved in the management or co-management of forests or natural protected areas, forests are better conserved. With clear and secure tenure and use rights, both a sense of responsibility and an interest in sustainable management of forest resources can be developed and maintained. An assured opportunity for long-term income from the forest has a significant impact on social stability, eliminating land disputes and reducing both the pressure to migrate and the resultant disruption to family and community life.

22. In all tenure arrangements, however broad or limited, the contribution of tenure rights to the commitment to sustainable forest management is increased in proportion to the clarity and enforceability of the tenure.

23. The stronger the tenure arrangement, the greater the benefits to both the family and community and to society as a whole. This contention should be the subject of a serious and urgent international dialogue to identify the concrete outcomes of clear and strong tenure arrangements for livelihoods, biodiversity and climate-change adaptation and mitigation in various parts of the world.

VI. Associations, unions and networks

24. The freedom of workers, farmers and small landowners, women, young people and communities to form associations is a basic right.

25. Associations provide a means by which their members can share experiences and know-how, present a common position to Governments and have the capability to effectively negotiate with other parties.

26. Associations provide a vehicle through which local people can contribute their detailed traditional and local knowledge of the forest to both policy development and local decision-making.

27. Associations can also act at the community and other levels to promote and undertake activities related to sustainable forest management that contribute directly to improving livelihoods, and are thus instrumental in implementing international commitments on the ground.

28. Associations play an essential role in contributing to the effectiveness of Government policies and programmes in both initial design and implementation; the potential value of this contribution is all the more important in times of budgetary constraint.

29. Associations sometimes criticize Governments. While no one likes criticism, especially given the increasingly challenging circumstances of the early twenty-first century, such criticism could challenge Governments to improve and strengthen policies and strategies for sustainable social and economic development.

30. Associations also collaborate as partners with Government agencies, generating a great mutual benefit that outweighs the perceived risks and pitfalls of collaboration.

31. Governments should consider the development of associations favourably and work to establish effective partnerships with them.

VII. The way forward

32. The specific issues discussed in this paper require concerted actions by Governments and civil society. While most of the required actions have been repeatedly debated, few have been adopted or implemented. Major constraints include budget restrictions, institutional resistance and political risks owing to differences within communities and civil society.

33. Achieving significant and durable progress on poverty reduction and in efforts to improve livelihoods requires substantial attention to the social dimension of sustainable forest management. In all countries and regions and at the international level, there are examples of significant, positive social development in forestry and related sectors. We propose that those positive examples be identified so as to form the framework for a set of guidelines for best practices in capacity-building, the inclusion of women and youth, meaningful improvements in tenure rights and the development of effective associations, unions and networks.